Samuel Checkley His Book

PROMISE-KEEPING

A Great

DUTY!

As it was Delivered in a

SERMON

By *Samuel Willard*, Teacher of a Church in *BOSTON*.

Prov. 25. 14. *Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift, is like Clouds and Wind without Rain.*

BOSTON, Printed by *Benjamin Harris*, and *John Allen*, at the *London-Coffee-House*, 1691.

1690.

Promise-Keeping | A Great | Duty. | As it was Delivered in a | Sermon | — | By Samuel Willard, Teacher of a Church | in Boston. | — | [Three lines from Prov. xxv. 14.] | — || Boston, Printed by Benjamin Harris, and | John Allen, at the London-Coffee-House. | 1691. 16mo. pp. (1), 28.

Titlepage, *verso* blank; 1–28, "Promise-Keeping | a Great | Duty," headpiece two lines of border pieces; last leaf blank.

Near the top of the *verso* of the blank leaf at the end is written, "Samuel Checkley his Booke 1691."

Bost. 2ds. IX. 490.

PROMISE-KEEPING

A Great

DUTY

Cor. 1. 18. *But as God is true, our word towards you, was not yea and nay.*

THE principal occaſion of *Pauls* Writing this Second Epiſtle to his *Corinthians*, ſeems to have been, ſome Aſperſion that the falſe *Teachers* who came among them, had caſt upon him: which they had taken advantage to do, by a Miſinterpretation of ſome Expreſſions that he had uſed in the former Epiſtle, which they had perverſly applied to the Scandalizing of his Perſon and Miniſtry: One of theſe was from a promiſe which he made of *Coming to viſit them*, Chap. 16. 5. which it ſeems, he had failed in performing, being hindred from coming, partly by the *unforeſeen Troubles* which he had met

with in *Asia*, which providentially imped his intended Journey; partly in respect o the unfit posture which this Church was in t receive him at that time. This they alleadg ed against him, as if he were a light and in constant man; very rash in promising, an very negligent in performing: which thoug some might think it a very small matter t raise a scandal upon, and to have proceede rather of malice than any just occasion given yet we see how solemn and industrious *Pa* is to wipe it off, and clear himself in thi matter.

There are two things which our Apost endeavours to make good.

1. That when he made that promise t them, it was without *levity*, *i. e.* that it wa *serious*, *real*, according to his present intenti on, with a due subordination to Gods Wil and Providence, *verse* 17. 2. That there wa a just and necessary hindrance which interv ned, by which he was prevented from doin what he had so purposed, and brought hi under an obligation to take other measure so that he was not in the least blame-worth on this matter: Our Text belongs to th former of these; and in it there are tw things to be taken notice of,

1. *A Strong Asseveration*; as God is tru *in the Greek it is an abrupt form of Speech*; Gr

Tru

True: *To omit other Interpretations, this kind of expreſſion is uſed in* Scripture *as an Elliptical invocation of God, in adjuring him, and carries in it the nature of an Oath; it is* q. d. as ſure as God is true, *or*, I appeal to the God of Truth; *and thus that phraſe*, God lives, *is divers times rendred*, as God lives; *and this ſhews that* Paul *accounted it no trifling matter to be ſuſpected in this thing: as having been well inſtructed not to uſe additional aſſeverations and appeals unto God, as words of courſe in his ordinary Communication, but only at ſuch time as the caſe did require it.*

2. The thing aſſerted by him, or that to which the aſſeveration is connected; *Our word toward you, was not yea and nay. Our word*; there be ſome who apply this to his *Preaching*, as if he intended that he had been ſtedfaſt in his Doctrine, and had not been off and on, as to any Article of it: but there are others who do more pertinently apply it to his word of promiſe, that is made mention of in the *verſe* next foregoing. Although, becauſe his Calumniators were ready enough to inſinuate, that he who ſo little regarded his word of promiſe made unto them, would be every whit as inconſiderate in his Preaching; he therefore ſubjoyns a vindication of that too, *verſe* 19. By *yea and nay*, he intends *off and on*, *fallacious*, *deceitful*, ſpeaking without any conſideration or intention at

all, but meerly in complement, and upon pretence; and he means on the other hand, that he was *real, honeſt, and ſincere in it:*

We may from hence obſerve this,

DOCTRINE.

It is a great and momentous Duty, incumbent on the People of God, to be true and faithful in their Promiſes.

Paul lookt upon it as a great reflection and reproach caſt upon him, that he was otherwiſe repreſented by the falſe Teachers; and therefore reckons it his Duty and Intereſt to clear up his Integrity in the matter, and becauſe no other knows the ſincerity of the heart, he therefore doth it by a ſolemn appeal to God, who is the diſcerner of hearts.

In the clearing up of this Doctrine, there are two things which will call for our enquiry, viz.

1. Wherein the *Truth* of *Promiſes* doth properly conſiſt?

2. Of what concernment it is for the people of God to be very careful in this matter? and it is to be obſerved that this Duty belongs to, and is to run through the whole of a *Chriſtian's Converſation.*

I. *Wherein*

1. Wherein the *Truth* of *Promises* doth properly Consist?

A. I may here premise a few words concerning The nature of a *Promise*; and of *Truth* as it stands related to a promise.

1. *A Promise* is a Voluntary Obligation of one Person to another, wherein he stands bound to do something for him. In all Promises there are two Parties to be considered, One that makes it, and another to whom it is made. In *making* of a *Promise* the man becomes bound; he gives his word for the thing: either he was at liberty before, and now he becomes voluntarily Obliged, and so parts with his freedom; or else it was a Debt or Duty, which he before was under a Moral tie unto, & by thus promising, he makes himself further engaged: hence there is supposed *a Consent of the will* on his part, who makes it, by which the man ties his own hands, & puts himself under the command of another; and it is to do something for him; this differenceth it from a threatning, which is to do against him; & hereupon there follows a *performance* to be requisite by vertue of the promise: after which the man is in Conscience bound to endeavour; this is clear by the light of nature.

2. *Truth*, as it refers to a promise, is firstly a Conformity between the mind of the promiser, and the thing which is promised; which

Truth

Truth farther diſcovers it ſelf by his practical purſuit of the thing, *Truth* of words in General, is when men ſpeak as the thing is: A promiſe is a word paſt by a man concerning any matter, and it may then rightly be ſaid to be true when it is according to the thing: and this firſtly relates to the *mind* of the ſpeaker, then ſecondarily to the *action* depending thereupon, for there is a neceſſary Connexion between theſe two, to make the word true: here then we may particularly take an account of this Duty, and lay down ſome ſpecial Rules by which it is to be attended, & that,

1. In the making.
2. In the *performing* of them.

1. In the *making* of a promiſe, let theſe things be obſerved.

1. That in all the promiſes we make, we owe a *Subordination* to the will of God; and therfore we ought to have an eye or reſpect thereunto always in our making of them: There was a Law in *Iſrael* that if an inferiour perſon made a vow (and a promiſe partakes in the nature of a vow) the Superiour, who had a power over that perſon, might vacate the vow, upon the hearing of it, if he would; and we are all of us Gods Servants, and he hath incomparably more power over us then any ſecond being can have over his fellow creature; every *promiſe* is therefore preſumed to be

under

the diſpoſal of Gods pleaſure ; and it is good for us, in acknowldgement thereof, explicitly to ſay *if God will* ; and there is a double reſpect to the will of God which is here to be had.

1. To his *preceptive* will ; we ought always to be ſatisfied in the lawfulneſs of the thing, before we Dare to bind ourſelves; if we bring ourſelves under the Obligation of doing any ſinful action, we forfeit our Truth, for in the very act of doing ſuch a thing we prove ourſelves falſe unto God, and then what Truth can there be in us? every ſin is a ly, according to Scripture-account, and then to promiſe to commit a ſin, is to engage unto a Ly.

2. To his *Providential Will*, we have not our power in our hands, for the performance of any thing that we promiſe ; God both can, and alſo doth whatſoever he ſees meet, put in an unforeſeen, and unavoidable impediment, which ſhall altogether diſenable us from doing the thing which we intended ; he can give obſtruction to the thing, and lay unconquerable difficulties yea impoſſibilities in the way of performance ; or he can cut us off from our deſigns, & make all our *thoughts to periſh* at once : we are then always to acknowledge, and carry about with us the conſideration of this in all that we engage ourſelves about, or plight any promiſes for the

doing, else we despise Gods Providences, and may well expect to be frustrated; hence that caution, *Jam.* 4. 14 and such a limitation had this very promise to which *Paul* refers in our Text, see *verse* 16. 7. *if the Lord permit.*

2. *There must be a true and sincere* intention *to do the thing, if God do not prevent it. This is the proper conformity between the mind and the tongue; when our words are the expressions of our hearts, and our promises are the true manifestations of our real purposes: this is it which makes our yea to be yea; when our words are a true glass in which we do shew our hearts; when in the very act of promising we carry that resolution in our minds, that nothing but the uncontrolable will of God shall in any wise prevent us from doing the thing, according to the true purpose and meaning of our words, opposite hereunto are;*

1. *An inward* resolution *never to perform: when promise one thing, and resolve upon the contrary at the same time; say they will do such a thing, and mean not to do it: this is direct and positive lying; for herein the tongue contradicts the mind; and as there is a lie materially contained in every contradiction, so the guilt of it lies heavy upon that man who doth it knowingly,* thus Ananias *is charged for* lying, *Act.* 5 *begin. he said that it was* but so much, *when he knew that it was a great deal more.*

2. An *irresolution* in the mind of the man about it, this is the *levity* which the Apostle makes mention of, *Context*, *verse* 17. A promise made without due deliberation beforehand; a cursory obligation that a man makes without so much as thinking, or having any regard to what he saith, when his word passeth from him: and when it is so, that which naturally follows upon it, is that he takes no more thought about it afterwards, nor in the least concerns himself to see that it be discharged: this also is inconsistent with the *Truth* that is herein concerned, which lays the man under bonds, whereas this frame of spirit leaves the man insensible of any, and there can be little expectation that ever he should fulfil according to his word.

3. It must be in that which is in the *man's power* to perform, in the ordinary course of Gods Providence. It is not lawful for men to promise impossibilities, whether in themselves so, or in their circumstances; nor ought they to be rash in promising improbabilities, there are many things which a man hath not in his own hands, nor is it in his view, how he shall be able to obtain them; some things a man is able to do for any thing that is in them, but he cannot do them in such a time: now to promise in any of these considerations, is to necessitate him-

ſelf to ly; and it is *profaneneſs* added to *falſe-hood*, for him to impute his diſappointment of doing them, to the Providence of God, becauſe in very deed God's Providence, if he had any regard to that, did plainly forbid him from making of any ſuch engagements. There are al o ſome things that are very hazardous, ſuch as things ventured at Sea, and men had need to be very cautious, and plain dealing in ſuch promiſes, elſe they may impoſe upon others, and that is ſo far againſt the *Truth*: For any to promiſe a payment by ſuch a day, when he neither hath it in his hands, nor hath a proſpect of a way in which he ſhall probably come by it, is a meer purpoſe to deceive, and may well be branded for a *Cheat*: to ſay he hopes it, when he hath no rational hope at all, in the ordinary courſe of ſecond cauſes, is but very little better, if any thing at all: To promiſe more work to be done within the compaſs of ſuch a time, then it will allow him to do, with all the diligence that he is able to uſe, is likewiſe of the ſame nature: But to promiſe that which he may do, and is in the power of his hand, in caſe God ſhall pleaſe to continue his health and limbs, or if he preſerve his Eſtate unto him which he hath in poſſeſſion, this muſt he acknowledge to be within a mans ordinary compaſs or ability: and the

Promiſer

Promiſer ought always to have a reſpect to that.

2. In the *performing* of *Promiſes*. Here alſo there is Truth to be regarded as well as in the other; and this is that which is called *Faithfulneſs*: which fidelity is nothing elſe, but our carefully verifying, or giving being to the word which we have paſt; the word which is given, is a pattern or pledge for ſome deed which is to be done; the reaſon of a promiſe, is, becauſe there is ſome time to intervene in order to the doing of the thing, which is ſecured by ſuch a word, ſo far as it will go.

Here then theſe Rules are to be minded.

1. That if God by ſome *unforeſeen Providence*, diſable a perſon from doing according to his Word, it is not to be imputed to him for a ſin, if he do come ſhort of performing: it doth not make the man guilty of an untruth, tho he ſhould fall behind in the thing: always provided that his intentions were honeſt, and there were no fallaciouſneſs in the management; and for men to aſperſe him with knavery or cheating on this account, it is to throw dirt in the face of Gods Providence; it is the duty of all men to accept of anothers word, under ſuch a proviſo, and not to think that any can foreſtal him, *Who doth his pleaſure in the world*, or to think any Chriſtian ſo mad as to intend, *I will do ſo*,

whether God will or no; if it be labour, and God lays the man up ſick: if it be money, and God takes all from him, he is to be pitied and not reproached: *Paul* for this Reaſon, counts it hard *Meaſure* for him to be Conſumed in this regard, when unforeſuſpected *Troubles in Aſia* had prevented his truly intended Journey.

2. That ſomtimes the caſe of the Party unto whom the promiſe is made, makes it a duty, at leaſt to *ſuſpend* the doing of the thing: A promiſe is always ſuppoſed to intend the doing ſomething for another, *i. e. for his good*, that which is to do him harm is of the natue of a threatning, and is often a miſchievous thing; If then it ſhall afterwards prove (as ſometimes it doth ſo fall out that it doth ſo prove) to be apparent for his hurt, eſpecially if it be very pernicious. The promiſer is hereby brought under the Obligation of another duty, which ſuppoſes the former: and this is a great *Truth*; *Viz.*: that two actions the one whereof is neceſſarily ſubverſive of the other, cannot be a mans duty at the ſame time, to the ſame perſon; for Gods Command never involves us in contradictions: *Paul* intended to come to *Chriſt*, at ſuch a time, hoping that his Epiſtle would have prepared them to give him a good welcome; but it falls out that if he how comes it would be to his Grief, and not to their comfort, hence he Pleads this *Ver.* 23. I pro-

miſe a man to furniſh him with ſuch a weapon, by ſuch a day, but in the Interim, I am fully aſſured that he intends to Murder himſelf with it; I am bound to withhold it; and in keeping the ſixth Command, I do not violate the *Ninth*: only we muſt not frame ſuch things on ſurmize, to Cover our own Infidelity.

3. That it is our Duty to make Conſcience of performing Our Promiſes, according to the true tenour and intent of them: there is a great care which is incumbent on us in this reſpect; if once our word be paſt from us, we nave now parted with our liberty, & ought to account ourſelves to be under a Conſcientious tie: A promiſe is a kind of a Vow; and we have the wiſe mans, advice, *Eccl.* 5. 5. *better* it is that thou ſhouldeſt not Vow, then to Vow and not Pay. We ſhould not account ourſelves to be at our own diſpoſe, but to know that our *Truth* lyes at the ſtake, which ought to be very dear to us, & carefully Preſerved by us; we ought not *therefore* to forget it; but to bear it in our minds, and to be in Travail till we have brought it to paſs. And we muſt be ſure that there be no fallacy in it, no Deceit, or Evaſion, our word ſhould be according to our intention, and then our Performance muſt keep pace with our word; elſe the very end and uſe of words is perverted, which is the imparting of

our minds one to another.

4. There must be no seeking of *excuses*, or shifting of the thing by evasions: men sometimes promise, and then repent of it, they did not so well consider, and afterwards upon reflection, they begin to think, there is some inconvenience in the thing, they have Disadvantaged themselves by it; & now they set themselves to study some cunning Evasion, so to put off the Performances; here the contrary is given as one of the Characters of an honest and good man. *Psal.* 15. 4 *He sweareth to his own hurt, and Changeth not.* Not as if he doth Designedly study harm to himself, but if it prove so through want of foresight, that he will not for that reason revoke his word: it is not our own Personal Damage that should make us shift off a promise, if our word be once given; we must rather suffer in our Personal Interest, then Violate our Engagement,

5. We ought therfore to do nothing afterwards that will impede our performances, and necessitates us to fail in our promise. If God sees *meet to* put in an obstruction, we are *to adore* his providence & submit quietly to his *Supremacy*; but if we do it our selves, it will bring us under blame; if it be heedlessly, we are faulty by it, but if it be designedly, this will be imputed to our fallacious mind; and render us al together inexcusable; he that en-

gageth to do one thing, and then ſets about that which will certainly put him by from being able to attain it, practically ſets himſelf againſt the *truth*, and voluntarily neceſſitaets himſelf to tell a ly.

2. Of what *concernment* it is for the people of God to be careful in this matter.

A. Promiſes are made either to, *God* or *man*, the former of theſe are by a more peculiar appropriation called *vows*; and do not belong to our preſent diſcourſe: the latter are properly ſecond-Table-Duties, and are a part of that *love* which we owe unto *men*: but yet the ſecond great comprehenſive command *is like unto the firſt*, inaſmuch as it is ſtamped with the ſame authority, and hath the ſame ultimate end, leading unto the glorifying of God as well as the other: and there are ſundry weighty conſiderations which will repreſent this to us as a momentous Duty; eſpecially,

1. The *honour of God* is herein deeply concerned. *Truth* is one of the Divine Perfections, it is a vertue wherein we ſhould ſtrive to be perfect as God is: and there are ſome who put ſuch an interpretation upon our text, *as God is True*; ſo would I be True too, I would be like him. It is for children ſtudiouſly to imitate their parents in that which is good and commendable; and in ſo doing

they come to be a credit to them, and honour themselves too; it greatly pleaseth a Father to see this in his child: now God hath so much testified to his approbation of *Men of Truth*, in the scripture, & so awfully threatned the *lying tongue*, to shew how much he esteems himself to be honoured by the one, and dishonoured by the other: yea, how many have bin the signal Testimonies of Gods providence against Promise-breakers; this was the ruine of *Zedekiah* and *Jerusalem* 2 *Chron.* 36. 13. and see how the prophet comments upon it, *Ezek* 17. 15. all the world expect that they who profess the *fear of God*, should be under the aw of him, so as not to dare to falsifie their word: and therefore the name of God suffers exceedingly by it, if such do fall behind in their performances, and therefore;

2. The *credit of Religion hath a deep interest herein. Gods people have to do with a great many men that have but little knowledge of the true Religion, and who care not to concern themselves to be acquainted with the* Mysteries *of it: but all men understand something about* moral honesty, *which, without doubt, appertains to the practicks of Christianity, and every one that calls himself Christian, makes a profession of, and would be thought to be singularly concerned about: and it is certain, the men we are speaking of, do*

measure

measure all Religion by it, it is the Standard by which they try it; and they account men just so much Religious as they are morally honest: this fidelity therefore gives a lustre to a Christian's Profession, and gains unto Religion it self a commendation from them; they will say such a man is sure a good man, he makes conscience of his word: whereas a bare neglect of this, will expose the whole of a mans profession to contempt; it will make those to think and say, such men use Religion to no other purpose than to be a cloak for their knavery; and might it stop here, it were not so much, but how ready will they be to inferr from hence, that Christianity it self is nothing else but a license given men to indulge themselves in immoralities? I am sure Paul *met with this reflection more than once, though he gave no occasion for it; much more is it to be expected where there is.*

3. The Christians *Conscience* is herein laid to *Pawn.* Suppose the man was Entirely at his own liberty before, and under no necessity of making such a promise, yet if once he doth make it; he is now Tied unto it by his own act; & what is the Security that is given unto him to whom the Promise is made, but that now the mans *Conscience* is become a *Pledge*: if therefore he perform the thing which he hath undertaken, he now saves his Conscience, takes up his *Pawn*, but if he breaks that, he forfeits this; and

what hath that man left him, that is of any worth at all, who hath Forfeited and loſt his Conſcience? if once it comes to Paſs that a man hath no regard to that, he hath not only loſt his Religion, but his Morality too: and he who deſpiſeth his Conſcience, *Deſpiſeth God*, who is the Lord of Conſcience, and unto whom it is accountable for all that is done by the man.

4. The mans *Perſonal Credit* is here alſo intereſted. Every man hath a Concern lying upon him, to get and keep a good Name; & that being a thing of great worth, his Concernedneſs ought to be ſo much the more about it, *Eccl.* 7 1. and the *Chriſtian* hath more reaſon than any man to be Careful in this matter, becauſe his own name cannot be loſt, without ſome reflection upon the name of God. It is true, Chriſtians, who live among them that are Enemies to Chriſt, are warned to expect to ſuffer from the world, in *Name Eſtate, Liberty*, and every way, nor can they Eſcape it by all their Holy and Righteous Converſation, but may rather expect to meet with the more of it; yet have we the Rule given us for Caution, that though we cannot avoid ſuffering, yet we take heed, *What we ſuffer for*, 1. *Pet.* 4. 16. Bnt the world will throw this dirt upon him; it hath ever been their Endeavour to Aſperſe

perſe good men with immoralities; but it is our care to ſee that theſe Aſperſions be not true; but Notorious lies. Let a man Brag never ſo much of a Profeſſion, tell the world never ſo many ſtories of his Converſion; yet if he be not a Morally honeſt man, he is nothing at all: what ſaith the Apoſtle to this? *Jam.* 1, 26. & 1. *Joh.* 4. 20 Nay ſuch an one, not only Forfeits his Reputation for a Good man, with the ungodly, but with thoſe that are Godly, who are to *judge of the Tree by it's Fruits*; he that makes it a cuſtomary and little matter to falſify his word, deſervedly incurs this diſcredit; if it may be truly ſaid of him, that he regards not his Promiſe, there is no truſt to be put in that man nor is he to be believed in any thing.

5. The *Welfare of Humane Society* is very much Concerned in this matter. Man is made a ſociable Creature, and the Comfort *of* Mankind is maintained by mutual *Entercourſe* and Communion: Man is a *Dependent* Creature, and not only have all men their abſolute Dependence upon God; but one man hath a great deal of Dependence upon another, without which the Affairs of this life cannot be carried on for the ſupport of our Livelyhood, there are many things man *wants*, and there are many Vocations are needful for the ſupply of them, one man cannot Carry

ry on all by himſelf; and hence it comes to paſs, that there is mutual Traffick between men and Tranſactions among them in the Management of it: nor can all things be carried ſo, as that there ſhould be no more but Preſent commutation, but men muſt truſt one another; and therefore Covenants and Promiſes muſt paſs beween them for the future doing this or that, which may Anſwer the ends of each: & that which makes theſe promiſes to paſs for currant between man & man, is truth in the promiſer; it is the Opinion of that which gives him Credit with the other party; but for which Opinion he would refuſe to take his word or credit him on the value of it: if therefore there be a failure upon this account, mankind is diſappointed; & if it ſhould grow to be a common thing, the Ligament of Humane ſociety is diſſolved and Communities muſt be disbanded: if Truth fail all is put to a rout: if once a man cannot be believed, what ſhould any others have any more to do with him? by this means ſecrets come to be revealed to mens great detriment; expectations are hereby fruſtrated, buſineſſes of greateſt moment diſappointed and humane traffick wofully entangled; hence ariſe quarrellings, tedious law-ſuits, yea Contention & every evil work: whereas on the other hand

were

were men but True & faithful, how happily might they live together? what helps and Comforts might they be mutually one to another? it is indeed the Ligature of all societies & if it be broken they will fall in pieces: & when all those *things* are put together, It *will* tell us what reason the Apostle had to be so Careful in defending his *credit in this Respect*.

USE I.

This Doctrine then may serve to reprove the too great neglect of this Duty, among those that make a *profession of Piety*. How it is upon this account, is best known to every mans Conscience; but I am sure there is a great deal of complaint made, and no little reproach cast upon the ways and people of God in this matter; and too many, who have made the highest profession of Christianity, and entred into solemn explicit Covenants with God, are ill represented upon this account: Promise-breaking is an aspersion that is cast into many a mans dish: and if the thing be true, let all such know, that they are guilty of a great and scandalous sin, and beware that you do not think slightly of it, and go about to evade it, and suppress the conviction of it in your own consciences,

ces, by any trivial excuſes: and if there be any of ſuch perſons, whoſe hearts do condemn them before God for this ſin, let it help to bring them to deep Humiliation, and ſhaking *Repentance*: *think* how much *diſhonour* you have brought to Gods *precious* Name by *this*, how wofully you have opened the mouths of ungodly men, and *given* them occaſion to *ſpeak evil of you*, and your profeſſion; how much you have wounded the *Charity* of them that fear God, and laid your ſelves under *their* juſt *ſuſpicion* of your *ſincerity*; how dangerouſly you have expoſed your Profeſſion to contempt; and made holy and *conſcientious Chriſtians* to ſuffer for your ſakes. But I ſhall turn my *Reprehenſion into Exhortation*; and therefore,

USE II.

Let it ſerve to *adviſe and excite* all Chriſtians to a *careful* and *conſtant practice* of this Duty. Among the other parts of a goſpel converſation, ſee that you do not forget this, to be at all times true to your promiſes: what hath been already ſaid in the clearing up the weight of this Duty, may be made uſe of as as arguments to move us to hearken to this advice, I ſhall therefore only adde theſe two conſiderations.

1. It is your Duty to be *examples* in all Moral honesty, to all other men. The people of God ought to endeavour to outdo all others whatsoever, in righteousness, *Math.* 5. 20. *except your Righteousness exceeds &c.* The Grace of God where it is received teacheth men effectualy to do these Duties, *Tit* 2. 11 12. *to live Righteously, &c. Christs Disciples* are *said to be* the *lights of the world*, and for that reason they should labour *so to shine*, that they may win others, *Mat.* 5. 16. it is therefore a crying shame to them, that any such who make no pretence to holiness and the fear of God, are yet to be commended for these things far above them; that do by many degrees out-do them; that there is a great deal more confidence may be put in them, and their word is much safer to be trusted unto than any of theirs: to be able without slander, to say of any one who tells all men that he is a Servant of Jesus Christ, that he is not to be believed in any promise that he makes, what an horrid shame must this be? let there then be no such occasion offered.

2. You will have a great deal of *peace in* thus doing, whereas otherwise you will create for yourselves a great deal of *trouble*. Every man, next to God, hath most of all to do with his own Conscience, and it is his greatest wisdom carefully to provide for the quiet of that; it is his *best friend*, if he do

maintain the peace of it, and it is his *worſt foe*, if he will be ſo fooliſh as to ſet it againſt him: and whatſoever Evaſions men may uſe to baffle their Conſciences withall for the preſent, yet they keep a true Regiſter, and will have a time to call men to a ſevere Reckoning; then it will be an unſpeakable comfort, to be able to ſay of our ſelves, as *Paul* doth, *Acts* 26. 16. if we maintain *Truth in the inward parts*, that will be matter of ſolid conſolation, in the darkeſt hours of Temptation: but it will be a terrible thing, when our thoughts ſhall be made to reflect inward, then to have ſuch accuſations as theſe are; I have been falſe to men, how can it be then that I ſhould be true to God? I have had little or no regard to my word; I made nothing of promiſing, and as little of breaking promiſe: all that you can gain by your falſehood or ſave by cunning tricks to put off your engagements, will never compenſate this miſchief: all that you can ſuffer by being honeſt and true, though you ſhould loſe conſiderably in your outward concerns will not make you poor, or hinder your inward quiet: this will be a ſolid comfort to you at all times.

And for your help and Direction in this matter take theſe few Rules.

1. Be *Conſiderate* and *Cautious* in making of Promiſes, men that are raſh and haſty in Promi-

Promising, will be every whit as slow & regardless in performing: he that really accounts his word, when once it is past, to be as Obliging on his Conscience, in point of Truth, as if he had given his Oath unto it, will be sure first to think of it Deliberately, and look it round, before he will bring himself under such a bond: Consideration well becomes a prudent man at all times, in all cases that are of any moment; a *rash man*, will never gain the Reputation of a wise man: and here you are to Consider, whether you may do it in regard to the Lawfulness of the thing: otherwise you will bring yourselves into a Snare; for although sinful promises, when the thing promised is forbidden us by the Precept, are not to be kept but broken; and to fulfil them, is to add sin to sin, yet there is folly to be imputed to and repentance required of such as so do: *Herod* was a fool for making such a Promise as he did, but he was worse then a Mad-man for standing to it *because of his word*. Think also whether you may Promise it in point of ability to perform: do not dare to engage any thing which you know you must of necessity never fulfil; a *Physical* impossibility makes it a moral evil in us, to oblige ourselves to the Doing of any thing which otherwise were Lawful for us, were it in our power: think

alſo whether it will not *Repent* you of it afterwards, and ſo become a *Temptation* to you either to Fraud or Falſehood; that ſo being Clear in what you do, you may be the more fixed in your Reſolutions to ſtand to your word.

2. Having promiſed, now carefully avoid all *Temptations* to *Diſhoneſty*, beware that you give not the leaſt entertainment to any thoughts of fraudulent dealing in the thing: do not meditate nice evaſions, nor ſtudy to find any advantage how to break or to be any whit worſe then your word. A Chriſtian ought to be very *clear, ſincere, upright* in promiſing, and he will herein make it appear that he was ſo, when he purſues it in his practiſe, when he hates any thing that looks like a deceit, and though he might yet will not make uſe of it: There are a great many cunning tricks, that ſome men ſtudioully make uſe of, to impoſe upon their neighbours withall, accounting it a matter of credit, and that which deſerves commendation, that they can thus live by their wits: but it very ill becomes a Chriſtian thus to do: that is a duty with reſpect to all our dealings with others, *Rom.* 12. 17. *providing things honeſt in the ſight of all men*; however witty men may count ſuch a man to be, I am ſure all honeſt men will vote him *wicked*

and

That is a very ill *Epithet* to be put upon any one that calls himself by the name of Christian.

3. Hence beware of making any *Enquiry* after the Promise is given. That is a thing which is to be done before, but it comes too late, and out of order afterwards; it is good and a piece of Prudence for men before they proceed to oblige themselves, to say *What shall I do?* shall I bind my self or no? what will be consequent upon it? but when our word is gone, then to say, *What have I done?* many times Proves to be a great sin, and puts us upon sinful and scandalous Courses to undo again, when it is too Late; when once we have brought our selves under the obligation, our business now is to study, how we may perform; whereas such enquiries as these mostly tend to put us upon thinking how to evade and falsify our word, when we think we have been over-seen, or are like to be losers by the bargain.

4 Beware of *forgetting* your promises. It will be no *extenuation*, but rather an *aggravation* of you fault so to do: it will argue a great want of integrity: that is one of the main ends of a promise, to put us in mind of what we have to do: and if we do indeed purpose the thing, it will set us about it, and then there will be no danger of the forgetting

5. Keep

5. Keep the *Fear of God* always befor your eyes. Think it not enough that you can escape the Laws of men, which is all that too many take any thought about, and think all is well if they can keep clear of falling under their Lash.

But remember. God is a *witness* of all the promises that you make, and he will be an *avenger* of all falshood: be afraid of provoking him to anger at you, or of exposing his Name to reproach among men. think the time is coming when you must *give an account of every idle word* unto the great Judge; then all tricks and trivial excuses will be insignificant: he will then *bring the hidden things of dishonesty to light*: promise breakers then will have an awful account to give in. Let us then pray that *uprightness and integrity may preserve us*; that God will *take from us the way of lying*: this will be one way to help us to live in credit among men to enjoy great peace in our owne spirits, and appear with comfort, before the great Judg at the Last Day.

FINIS.

Samuel Checkley his Booke
1695

E187.1 Checkley